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RESEARCH NEEDS AND PRIORITIES IN STUDENT PERSONNEL WORK--A POSITION PAPER OF THE NASPA DIVISION OF RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS.

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT IS TO STIMULATE RESEARCH AND PUBLISHING ACTIVITIES THROUGH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NEED FOR MORE DATA COLLECTION AND WRITING, AND PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH PRIORITIES IN TERMS OF LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE. A RATIONALE FOR RESEARCH ACTIVITY IS GIVEN, WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE DEMANDS ON THE COLLEGE DEAN OF STUDENTS. RESEARCH TOPICS ARE SUGGESTED IN SPECIAL ORDER, AND OTHER SPECIFIC QUESTIONS THAT HAVE RELEVANCE FOR STRENGTHENING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE DEAN ARE LISTED. OTHER ESSENTIAL AND BASIC RESEARCH NEEDS, ALL OF WHICH MUST BE TRANSLATED INTO RESEARCHABLE TERMS, ARE DISCUSSED. (PH)

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RESEARCH NEEDS AND PRIORITIES IN STUDENT PERSONNEL WORK: A Position Paper of the NASPA Division of Research and Publications

I. INTRODUCTION

The essential purpose of the NASPA Division of Research and Publications is to strengthen the student personnel dean in the daily performance of his duties. Central to this purpose is the stimulation of NASPA members to take reasoned positions on critical issues in student personnel work in higher education and to examine these positions in the context of accurate, comprehensive information and meaningful research results. To facilitate such activity, the division attempts to identify relevant issues, to delineate significant research needs, to establish research priorities and to stimulate investigations to fill gaps in our existing knowledge. The purpose of this document is to stimulate research and publishing activities through establishment of the need for more data collection and writing, and presentation of research priorities in terms of levels of importance.

II. THE NEED FOR RESEARCH ACTIVITY

Most would agree that the job of the dean of students is more difficult today than it was just a few years ago and that it will be even more demanding in the future. The work of the dean has been made more challenging by the increasing complexity and diversity that tends to accompany growth in student populations and change in educational experiences. In the midst of rapid change, it is difficult to keep fundamental principles and values in focus, to maintain a sense of personal and professional direction, to relate personally to students, and to make significant contributions to the learning process. The dean is confronted with the prodigious task of clarifying and redefining his role and objectives in the face of increasing diffusion of institutional goals and programs, growing depersonalization, and fragmentation of the academic community.

His efforts to cope with these demands may be complicated by poorly defined institutional objectives and by inadequately conceived organizational structures and educational offerings. In some instances, expansion and change have been so intense and time-consuming that little attention has been given to goal formulation and to related curricular and organizational development. Because of rapid growth, many institutions have been splintered to the point where it has been virtually impossible to involve a substantial portion of the academic community in determining institutional direction and curricular patterns. This fragmentation has intensified the traditional cleavages between students, faculty, and administration. As a result, the decision-making authority of the administration is being challenged to a greater degree, and student power groups are asking for a more significant place in institutional governance. Some students are not just demanding more active involvement in decision making; they are also advocating the disruption of institutional functions if their petitions are not granted.

How does the dean respond to these conditions? How does he seek personal and professional meaning and contribute to the educational enterprise in the face of these demands?

As a point of beginning, the dean must understand the values, convictions.

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aspirations and needs that determine his behavior. He must be aware of the perceptions others have of him and of role conflicts that interfere with his ability to assist students in their personal, social and intellectual development. He must also have insight into students' impressions of opportunities for learning and self-expression and institutional expectations and requirements. Furthermore, he must have knowledge of the factors that are conducive to learning and those that tend to restrict student growth. Basically, he must become an expert in human development -- a person who, by virtue of his insights and perspective, is able to make a unique and fundamental contribution to the educational mission of the institution.

The level of awareness and knowledge required by the dean to demonstrate expertise in student matters may be achieved through a variety of approaches, i.e. self-analysis, discussion with others, review of relevant literature and inquiries, development of position papers, and research activity. But regardless of the approach employed, there must be a commitment on the part of the dean to gain the insights necessary for making intelligent judgments. Too often we fail to reflect carefully on the significance of our decisions or to gather the data required for the evolvement of well-conceived administrative responses. Somehow we must find time in our hectic schedules for dialogue with students and faculty, for self-appraisal, for formulation of sensible conclusions on critical issues, and for the design and implementation of pertinent investigations.

It is the hope of the division that this paper will help further this end by posing questions that are current and troublesome to many in higher education. If we can come to grips with the issues suggested by these questions, we should be better equipped to perform at a high level of professional competence.

III. RESEARCH TOPICS

The questions that the division feels should be addressed by our profession are presented below in two classes or levels of significance: First order priority and other important research needs. In many instances, the answers required might be secured through well-designed studies while in other cases the best approach might be to present position papers that reflect the clearest thinking of our colleagues. A variety of approaches would seem to be indicated by the diversity of issues that are before us.

Questions related to the role and competencies of the dean have been considered of greatest significance. This should not be seen as failure to recognize the importance of other research needs but rather as an attempt to focus our resources and attention on those issues which seem to be most vital to the effective functioning of the dean. To do otherwise would deviate from the fundamental purpose of the division.

No attempt has been made to provide an exhaustive list of research needs. Instead, we have endeavored to present a reasonably comprehensive set of questions related to the role, functions and responsibilities of the deans and to some other problems that seem to be of most significance to our profession at this time.

A. Research of First Order Priority

The highest priority should be given to inquiries that clarify and delineate

the professional responsibilities and necessary competencies of the student personnel administrator. In particular, research is needed to give the dean clearer understanding of the following: (1) his own assumptions, convictions, and needs; (2) the expectations and perceptions of others with regard to his responsibilities and effectiveness; (3) the effects of his own behavior on his relationships with others in the academic community; (4) the extent to which these relationships and his perceptions of them affect his behavior; (5) his responsibilities to the academic community as a whole and to the constituent elements of that community; (6) the relationship of his work to the learning process; and (7) his responsibility to help students to recognize and learn from the consequences of their behaviors and to profit from their educational experiences.

Other specific questions that have particular relevance for strengthening the effectiveness of the dean are:

1. What working conditions are conducive to the effective performance of the dean? What are the typical daily activities of the dean? How might he organize his time to serve most productively the educational objectives of the institution?

2. What career patterns exist in student personnel administration and what factors influence attrition and continuation in the field?

3. What are the relationships between the student personnel worker's training and such factors as success or lack of success on the job, the perceptions others have of him, and role expectations defined by himself and the institution? To what extent is the prospective dean prepared to carry out the responsibilities he will face on the job and to cope with realities and needs on the campus?

4. Do the primary roles, responsibilities, and functions of the dean facilitate or hinder the learning process? What are the bases for the various roles, responsibilities, and functions performed? To what extent is the dean qualified or prepared to perform his various tasks?

5. What are the sources and bases of the perceptions others have of the dean? Do these perceptions vary among and between students, faculty, and staff? To what degree are the perceptions consistent with the dean's perception of himself and with generally accepted definitions of responsibilities and effectiveness in student personnel work?

6. What are the patterns of interactions between students and the student personnel staff? Are these relationships conducive to learning, personal development of students, and realization of intellectual objectives?

7. What factors contribute to dehumanization and depersonalization in the academic community? Do certain policies and practices tend to result in perceptions of depersonalization regarding the work of the dean and his staff? What is the relationship between lack of privacy and feelings of depersonalization among students? What should be the role of the dean in helping the institution to maintain personalization in an age of mass education?

8. What social and personal freedoms do students have on college campuses? Are there differences between their perceived and actual freedoms? Are there

certain freedoms or opportunities that they consider to be more important than others? What is the role of the dean in determining how students perceive and exercise freedom?

9. What are the essential characteristics of the decision-making process in institutions of higher learning? Does the process tend to reinforce or detract from the realization of institutional objectives and the maintenance of a viable community of learning? What is the extent of student involvement in decision making? What is the rationale behind student participation in institutional governance? What role should the dean play in the evolvement of campus decisions?

10. What responsibility should the dean assume for interpreting student needs to the president, trustees, faculty, and others in the academic community and for sensitizing them to required changes in standards and policies that are necessary to further student development? What role should he play in maintaining satisfactory relationships between students and the larger community?

B. Other Essential, Basic Research Needs

1. What are the foundations and nature of institutional authority over students? How should this authority be exercised to support the learning process?

2. What rights and responsibilities should students have as members of the academic community? Who should define these rights and responsibilities? What is the relationship between prescribed rights and responsibilities and student growth?

3. What are the causes of distrust of the administration? What are the bases of mutual trust and respect among members of the academic community?

4. How should student services be organized to permit their most effective operation?

5. What is the nature and extent of procedural due process in the adjudication of student conduct cases? Why have standards of due process been developed and what concepts have guided their formulation? What is the relationship between disciplinary policies and procedures and the objectives and responsibilities of the institution?

6. What provisions should be made to support freedom of association? Should the institution place any restrictions on this freedom? What are the most effective relationships between the administration and faculty on the one hand and student organizations on the other? Do these relationships vary with reference to student organizations not directly under institutional jurisdiction? What criteria and procedures should institutions follow in granting recognition to student groups?

7. What should be the essential purposes of student publications? What should be the relationship between the institution and student publications? Should publications be established as private corporations external to the institution? Who should determine literary standards for the campus and what guidelines should be followed in formulating such standards? How should conflicts over what constitutes acceptable literary standards be adjudicated?

8. What are the basic sources and causes of student protest? What type of student is protesting and what portion of the student body is actively involved in protest? How might institutions make provision for dissent and open criticism as well as for the protection of the rights of all members of the academic community and the integrity of the institution?

9. What conditions on the local campus contribute to the lack of integration of minority groups into the total campus community and to the fragmentation of their lives on campuses with increasing cultural diversity?

10. What type of student records should be maintained? What criteria should be used to determine which data should be treated confidentially and who should have access to student records? How long should student records be retained? What are current policies and practices regarding the administration of student records?

11. What responsibility does the institution have for the administration of student activity funds? What criteria and procedures should be followed in the allocation and spending of such funds?

The questions presented above have been stated in broad terms and must be translated into researchable form. NASPA members and others in higher education are encouraged to study these questions, to initiate investigations on their campuses and to present reasoned positions where thoughtful comment is suggested. Moreover, there is a need for the development of investigations that involve a substantial number of institutions and that have general significance for our member institutions. Through the intensification of research and writing activities, we can achieve greater understanding of how to perform our functions more effectively and to support, to a greater degree, the educational mission of our institutions.

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